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Wray

Living History

CLANK. CLANK. I could hear the sound of my men suiting up for battle. It was a sound I had grown used to over the years.

“Attalus,” I yelled, “bring me my shield and armor.”

I paced around the barracks. I could see the cloth tents wavering in the wind. In the distance the fighting had already began. The sound of men screaming reverberated through the air breaking the silence.

I heard the rustling of metal nearby as Attalus brought me my gear. He placed the items beside me. The golden embroidery on the shield glistened in the sunlight. Everyone in the army new that shield belonged to I, Cleitus the Black. The golden serpent imprinted on the front of it had become a trademark of mine. It had been handed down to me by my father and I have used it since my first battle.

“You may get going now, Attalus. We must ready up. The Persians should bring in their second wave of forces soon. At that time, we will accompany Alexander down to the Granicus River.”

With that, Attalus left and I was alone. I strapped up my armor and lifted up my spear. The spear felt weightless. I was so used to carrying it. To think that I have been Alexander’s general for over a decade and have gotten no recognition. I go out on the battlefield and fight with valor and dignity while the “Great” Alexander comes riding in on his horse and gets all the credit. Never do you hear the barber telling stories about how Clietus the Black ingeniously commanded his set of troops. No, no…it is all about how Alexander engineered an astounding victory over the enemy.

Nevertheless, I walked to the tents where the men I commanded were quartered. My legs felt heavy as I thought about the injustices I had faced. I tried to focus on the imprints the soles of my boots made in the grass below, but it was of no use.

“Arise, my brothers,” I bellowed, “The time has come to face the Persians. Spread the word to those in the other tents. May we be victorious on this day!”

Cries arose from the men in front of me. Spears and shields were raised mightily in the air. They knew how much this battle meant to all Macedonians alike. To defeat the Persians would be an astounding feat. Many of us had lost comrades in past skirmishes with the menaces.

More and more men started filtering in in front of me. I was proud of how I had trained them. They stood upright with their shield to their right and their spear to their left. The cavalry were also present.

I looked to the right and saw Alexander with his troops. They too stood upright and ready to go.

For a while there was silence. I breathed in my surroundings. Soon the fresh green grass in front of me would play host to dead bodies of Persians and Macedonians alike.

Without warning, Alexander yelled a command. His voice was one that could not be missed. His charisma and personality motivated his troops. Alexander’s and his troops gradually ran forward, screaming at the top of their lungs.

My heart started beating faster…it was time to go. I started to run forward, and my troops followed. Adrenaline rushed through my veins, and I felt giddy. Despite being 41 years old, this feeling never changed. I directed my men towards the Granicus River. This had been our battle strategy, to fight alongside the river. By doing this, we would be protected from enemies on the riverside. That would be one less flank route to worry about.

As I moved forward I faced a man who looked more like a beast than a man. The Persians had sent him my way. He chuckled as he approached me. Before he had time to react, I jabbed him with my shield in the knee. His massive structure sent him tripping backwards. Then, I thrust my sword in his abdomen. There was nothing more to chuckle about for this beast of a man.

As I advanced all I could hear was the sound of metal on metal and men groaning. There was also the occasional sound of horse hoofs clattering nearby. I kept moving to the right and soon I was alongside Alexander. He was fighting Spythridates, the governor of Lydia and Ionia, and his brother Rhoesaces. I turned towards Alexander. He was able to parry both of their blows, but kept getting pushed back. I turned back just in time to fend off a jab that would have punctured my gut. I slapped my offender’s sword down with mine, held it down with my shield, and then stabbed him in the stomach. He let out a yelp and fell to the ground.

I looked behind me. I was shocked to see how far back Alexander had been pushed. Swiftly, I shuffled to Alexander’s position to help out. I came at the right time. Just as Spithridates was bringing down his sword on Alexander, I sliced off his arm. Spithridates went staggering back and fell into his brother’s arms. I looked to my right at Alexander. He stood very still and his face was pale. Then, without saying a word, Alexander charged ahead.

It took me a moment to fully realize what had just happened. I, a mere general, had saved Alexander the Great’s life. I just saved the life of the man known as the world’s greatest conqueror. And what had his reaction been? He didn’t even say a word to me. Maybe a “Thanks Cleitus” would have been nice. That cocky bastard.

I just stood there for a few minutes, dumbfounded by what had just happened on the battlefield. My head was numb. Had I really just saved Alexander’s life? Wasn’t Alexander supposed to be invincible? It all didn’t make sense. Alexander was supposed to be the “hero” but heroes don’t need their lives to be saved.

We ended up being victorious against the Persians. Alexander held a party afterwards and could be seen drunk. He gave his usual dramatic speeches on his visions for the empire, which were even more dramatic while he was intoxicated. I left the party immediately, angered at how he could celebrate after almost being killed. Everyone at the party congratulated Alexander for his victory. Once again, I was forgotten.

Six years had passed since the battle at the Granicus River. Alexander continued to eradicate his enemies and validate his claim as the greatest conqueror.

On the eve of another conquering mission, Alexander held a banquet in a palace at Maracanda. Being his general, I attended the banquet.

There were at least thirty to forty people at the banquet. I went over to the table with the wine and poured myself a glass. Alexander was standing across from me at the table.

“Cleitus, good to see you my friend,” he said jovially. Alexander then made his way across the table. I could tell he was drunk as he wobbled over, almost losing his balance and falling.

“Good to see you Alexander,” I said curtly.

“How are your troops doing?”

“They are doing fine.”

I wondered what Alexander was getting at. He had never taken an interest in my affairs before. He had always left me to my elements.

“Cleitus, we could be great. Just think, we have already conquered the Persian empire, why not move into Asia?”

For once he used the word “we” and it definitely wasn’t sincere. I had the sense Alexander was trying to lure me into something.

“Alexander, this is not my empire, I do not gain anything from it. Surely you understand that…”

He ignored me. “I want you to command the 16,000 troops we acquired after defeating the Persian King Darius. I want you to fight the nomads in Central Asia.”

This was an outrage. These 16,000 troops Alexander is talking about are Greeks. Greeks for crying out loud. They are not fit to be soldiers, they are only useful as slaves. I felt betrayed by Alexander. Here he is trying to send me off to Asia in my late-forties all alone with a bunch of worthless Greeks. Is he trying to get rid of me? Furthermore, I would be away from Alexander and lose all my power.

“Alexander, surely you cannot be serious about this.”

“Oh, you will find that I am Cleitus. I am ordering you!”

“Please, have mercy. These are *Greek* troops you are talking about. Would you want to command an army of Greeks?”

The whole palace had gone silent. Everyone had stopped their chatter and turned their attention toward the two of us and the spectacle we were creating.

“Cleitus,” he sighed, “this isn’t about what I want or don’t want to do. This is about my orders. You will follow my commands.”

He continued, “Ahhh, I can see my plan unfolding. Once I have conquered the frontiers of Asia, no one will question my authority. You see Cleitus, it is my God given duty to conquer the Earth and I intend to carry out my duty. My father, Philip II, could come nowhere near my accomplishments.”

“You speak words of treason!” I retorted. “You are not even the legitimate king of Macedonians. You are only great because of your father.”

“Guards!” Alexander thundered.

Alexander’s voice was fierce and echoed throughout the room. This was the side of Alexander everyone feared. His guards would not move. They were afraid to intervene in this matter. Their masks successfully concealed any of their emotions.

Alexander picked up an apple from the table we were standing near and threw it. It hit me flat in the forehead. I wanted to let out a chuckle, but my better judgment stopped me from doing so. He was going to have to do more than that if he wanted to frighten me.

“Someone, give me a dagger. Now!” he shrieked.

Two pairs of arms grabbed me around the chest. I was startled. What were they going to do to me? For all I knew they could tie me down on a chair so that Alexander could get a clear shot with his dagger. I was lead out of the room I had just been in. To my surprise, someone else held Alexander down. So, this wasn’t a plot against me. As I left the room I could see Alexander twisting and turning, the veins in his throat were visible from where I was.

I wasn’t satisfied with just being taken away from Alexander. I wouldn’t surrender to Alexander in this manner and be thought of as a coward. If we had a disagreement we would fight it out. I was able to wrench myself loose of the men’s handle and reentered the room with Alexander.

For a second my heart stopped. Alexander had a javelin aimed right towards me. From behind I saw someone lunging towards Alexander, but it was too late.

“No! Please don’t. Please, I beg you…,” I pleaded.

It struck me in the chest…it was a perfect throw. As my eyes shut, I could see the Granicus River and the hills in the distance.